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THE
SOVEREIGNTY
OF
PROVIDENCE:

A SERMON.

PREDACHED AT

WHITE-CHAPEL,
LEEDS,

ON SUNDAY THE SECOND OF JANUARY,
1791.

By EDWARD PARSONS: R

Mortals be dumb; what Creature dares
Dispute his awful Will?
Ask no Account of his Affairs,
But tremble, and be still.

WATTS.

LEEDS:

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THE substance of the following pages was suggested to the Preacher, under the distress of a recent family bereavement. This circumstance, and the united requests of friendship, must apologize for his appearance before the public with such an unpopular offering as a SERMON.—The sentiments here investigated tend to inspire the hearts of men with reverence of the Supreme Being in his *works*, a just sense of obligation to him for his *benefits*, and a steady resignation to his will under the *afflicting vicissitudes* of his *providence*.—These are objects of infinitely greater moment than the *Shibboleth* and *Sibboleth* of parties—objects, in the accomplishment of which all *genuine* Christians will rejoice, whatever differences may exist among them, in reference to the *circumstantials* of religion.

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THE
SOVEREIGNTY
OF
PROVIDENCE.

Psalms cxv. 3.

BUT OUR GOD IS IN THE HEAVENS: HE HATH
DONE WHATSOEVER HE HATH PLEASED.

THE desire of Happiness is deeply rooted
in the nature of all rational creatures.
Hence it is, that we observe them individually
employed according to their peculiar tempers,
views, and opportunities; the ambitious in
the pursuit of glory; the avaricious in the
accumulation of wealth; the dissipated in the
gratification of appetites, which are their dis-
grace as men, and promote their ruin as the
candidates for eternity; but a few, renewed
in the spirit of their minds by the infinite love
of God, dare to be singular, not counting
even

even their lives dear, that they may gain durable riches in righteousness, and finish their appointed course with joy. With them all is well through every vicissitude of Providence, whether prosperous or adverse; whilst the deluded votaries of this world are weeping over the disappointment of their wishes, or betraying the most painful dissatisfaction in their accomplishment; uninterested in the covenant favour of Heaven, all nature will prove nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit, leaving a dreadful void in the mind, and often loading the soul with inexpressible anguish. To be sincerely affected with this truth, and to maintain such a deportment in every situation as will best correspond with its pure designs, are essential to the first dawn of solid peace in this state of probation, and the full fruition of promised happiness in Heaven.

I am aware that these sentiments are not congenial with the prevailing levity of modern times: that they are in general treated as the reveries of a disordered imagination, and the foolish declamations of enthusiasm; as the language of men inimical to the pleasures of social intercourse—of men soured by the

the disappointments of life, or incapacitated for its enjoyments. Nevertheless, wisdom is justified of her children, in the strength of their patience, and the abundance of their consolations.—You see one renouncing the pomp and grandeur of a Court; choosing rather to suffer affliction in the company of the despised, persecuted people of God—You hear a second, and he the Sovereign of a great nation, boldly testifying that he esteemed the pious door-keepers of God's house more noble and happy than those who dwelt in tents of wickedness, though surrounded with the royalties of empire—You observe a third Child of Wisdom, instead of madly arraigning the divine conduct, under a long succession of the most melancholy tidings, possessing his soul in patience, retaining his integrity against the strongest temptations, and vindicating the sovereignty of Providence in those contrarieties of which the life of the saints is composed. These great and blessed men saw their God in the Heavens, wisely and graciously over-ruling all their tribulations: and, animated by the joy set before them in the gospel, they displayed a lively compassion for those who counted their lives madness, a noble contempt
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of their pursuits, and a steady determination to know nothing amongst them but conformity to the Law of God, and resignation to his will.

To *investigate* and *improve* the *Sovereignty of Providence*, are the objects of this discourse—objects so interesting in their nature and consequences, that I rest assured you will hear me with candour and seriousness: And may he, whose prerogative it is to crown the institutions of religion with success, deign to favour us with the special influences of his Holy Spirit, that his testimonies may be our delight, and our counsellors in the house of our pilgrimage.

FIRST. All the concerns of the Universe in general, and each individual in particular, whether more or less important, are under the Government of God.

By him every thing visible and invisible was created, and *must* be under his authority. This authority is not tyranny. He is no unjust usurper; no weak, careless, fickle Being. His throne is subject to none of those mutations

tions which characterise the kingdoms of this world. In his character, as Lord of all, what a wonderful assemblage of excellence and glory ! Such excellence—such glory as must excite our deepest reverence, and most ardent delight. Infinite knowledge, invincible power, impartial justice, abundant mercy, and immutable veracity, are the perfections in and by which his providential kingdom now rules, and will finally triumph over all the kingdoms of the earth. He is among his creatures as a Master in his Family, a Pilot at the Helm, a Shepherd with his Flock, or a King on his Throne. He forms no foolish plans ; strikes no random blows ; acts on no peradventures ; his affairs are *well ordered*, though infinitely various ; and *sure*, though opposed by all the subtilty and rage of the bottomless pit. There is nothing impossible for his greatness, or too mean for his condescension ; for though he takes up the Isles as a very little thing, yet he also clothes the lillies of the fields, and numbers the hairs of our heads.

The elements acknowledge his omnipotent hand, and obey his sovereign pleasure. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds ;

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he hath made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of his thunder. Fire and hail, snow and vapour, and stormy winds fulfil his word.—All the heavenly bodies, in their various orders and stations, unite in publishing to this lower world the transcendent power that gave them existence, and the ineffable glory to which they owe all their lustre. They only shine to praise him who hath established them for ever; and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. They rest not day nor night preaching to an infidel race, the universal sovereignty of his providential reign. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet their munificent Creator feeds them. They all look up to him for their daily bread; and he is so interested in them, that even a sparrow, one of the most worthless of the feathered tribe, cannot fall to the ground without his permission. Birds of every shape and name shew forth the wonders of his praise in the rapidity of their flights, the melody of their voices, the variegated beauty of their plumage, and all the admirable peculiarities of their nature.—The
 Lord

Lord rules over every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. His power created, his bounty supplies them, and his wisdom has furnished them with every necessary mode of defence. They are all at his disposal, and in some way or other bear a part in the accomplishment of his purposes. At one time he chastises the obstinacy of the King of Egypt, by a grievous murrain on his horses and camels, his oxen and sheep; and at another time the faculty of speech is given to a dumb ass, to reprove the madness of a prophet.

Every minute part of the Universe occupies an appointed station, or moves under the hand of God in the promotion of an appointed end. But of all the lower works of God, man holds the highest rank. He is fearfully and wonderfully made—made but a little lower than the Angels, and crowned with glory and honour. I speak in reference to those faculties of thought, reason and speech, by which he is capacitated to serve his Creator and enjoy him for ever; for in his lapsed state he is more insensible, ungrateful, and irrational than the brutes. While the dull

ox knows his duty, and the more stupid ass his interest, *he* sacrifices *all* his original dignity in his wilful ignorance of, and incessant striving against him to whom he is indebted for his being, and its innumerable comforts. Oh, that they were wise; that they would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.

SECONDLY. There is an admirable fitness in the various operations of Providence, to display and advance the glory of all the perfections of God.

All the guilty passions, detestable vices, tormenting discords, and frightful deformities of life, are under his controul, and will infallibly be over-ruled for his honour. The oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, and the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary, with every appendant circumstance, were directed by this principle. The Scripture saith of Pharaoh, For this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.* The kings and rulers of the earth, who

* Rom. ix. 17.

who gathered themselves together against the Saviour of the world, whilst they gratified the pride and enmity of their hearts, promoted the intentions of him who sitteth in the heavens holding all his adversaries in derision; * against the holy child Jesus, † not a single step was taken but under the guidance of his decrees. Of this the Jews were wholly in the dark; and, strange as it may appear, it was their darkness instrumentally by which life and immortality were brought to light. Their counsels were so confounded, and their rage so managed, that they furthered in a wonderful degree what they most anxiously wished to frustrate.

God is glorified in the judgements he inflicts on his enemies. In the scriptures you see the King of kings clothed with terrible majesty, and travelling in the greatness of his strength, to vindicate his righteous conduct, and avenge his insulted honours. Here a long, long catalogue of the guilt and consequent ruin of mankind presents itself to our view. The stupidity of the Antediluvians; the lust of Sodom; the tyranny of Pharaoh; the rebellion

* Psalm ii. † Acts iv. 27, 28.

Bellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; the
 envy of Haman; the pride of Herod; and the
 apostacy of Judas, precipitate them into the
 hands of the living God, and, judgment pur-
 sues them to their own place. You know
 how the displeasure of God has hung over the
 Jews for more than seventeen hundred years.
 Because they crucified the Lord of Glory,
 wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.*
 There is often a particularly striking agreement
 between the sins of men and the judgments of
 God. Punishment is inflicted in perfect analogy
 with the nature and turpitude of guilt. Jacob
 deceived one relation, and is himself deceived
 by another. The favourite minister of Aha-
 suerus was hanged on the very same gallows
 he had prepared for Mordecai. Those who
 accused Daniel, and were the instruments of
 his being cast into the lion's den, were after-
 wards cast therein themselves. I suggest these
 things in order to shew you what an evil and
 bitter thing it is to sin against God; that in so
 doing you deprive yourselves of present peace,
 and stand exposed to a far more exceeding and
 eternal weight of misery.

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* 1 Theff. ii. 16.

The glory of the Deity shines forth in all the revolutions of the world. He changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings and setteth up kings.* This truth will not only apply to the changes which took place in the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman monarchies; but to all the changes of kingdoms and states from the creation of the world to its dissolution. By these revolutions of the times and seasons the King of Kings gradually advances the perfection of that empire which shall supercede all others, and stand for ever, to receive the honour of all the kings of the earth. And while he brings about and manages so many changes, he reveals himself as unchangeable and immutable in being and perfection. His brightness can suffer no eclipse through time or eternity. The world and all things in it shall perish; but thou, O Lord, shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

The praise of God is advanced in all the *tribulations* of life. He chooses the hour of
human

* Dan. ii. 21, 22.

human extremity to demonstrate the sovereignty of his power, and the unmerited riches of his goodness. When under some weighty affliction, we anxiously look on the right hand and on the left for refuge, not one comfortable gleam of hope within our view; when our fellow-men in prosperity are either unable or unwilling to help us, then is the time to cry to him who is never inattentive to the voice of woe—to him who declares himself a strong hold in the day of trouble, knowing and delighting in those who trust in him.*

When convulsed by the sorrows of a fond mother, under the hopeless fear of losing an only child, you all remember how God appeared for Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba. Joseph, envied and sold by his brethren, spent a considerable part of his life in servitude and bondage, that he might be exalted to the highest honours of Egypt, and thus save them and an aged father from the impending horrors of famine. Elijah, when ready to die with hunger and thirst, was miraculously fed by an angel; under a juniper tree he found a cake baked on the coals, a
cruise

* Nahum i. 7.

cruise of water at his head. By the brook Cherith, before Jordan, ravens, birds of prey, brought him bread and flesh every morning and evening; and finally, he was sustained by the widow of Zarephath, whose barrel of meal and cruise of oil did not fail so long as his necessity existed. Why are such singular interpositions of providence left upon record? Why but to invite our submission to God under all our distresses, and our confidence in him for support, consolation, and deliverance?

THIRDLY. The means by which the designs of providence are carried into effect, are, in general, such as tend to mortify the pride, and excite the surprise of the world.

The Almighty works the wheels of providence by the weakest means. Some of the most important events that have ever been accomplished, must be ascribed in a secondary sense to causes apparently insignificant and contemptible. The world was created by a word. Jehovah spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast. What strange, important events were connected with the

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dreams

dreams of Joseph, and his artless relation of them to his Brethren! Flies and insects plead the cause of God against the King of Egypt as effectually as an army of angels. To the rod of Moses the children of Israel were indebted for their deliverance out of Egypt, and those refreshing streams which issued from the smitten rock, and followed them through the waste, howling desert. Gideon, with his lamps and pitchers, and a handful of men, triumphs over the Midianites. David, an inexperienced youth, with a sling and stone, slew the terror, and revived the hopes of Israel. The great work of our redemption was wrought out by one whom the world despised and rejected on account of his poverty and meanness. By the instrumentality of twelve *poor* illiterate men, the gospel was promulgated at the first against all possible opposition. Under two sermons, preached by Peter, the fisherman, no less than five thousand souls were converted to the faith of Christ; and by Paul, the tent-maker, the glad tidings of peace with heaven were borne from Jerusalem, round about unto Illyricum. *Thus* the banner of the cross was displayed over the greatest part of the world—Thus our
God

God, who sitteth in the heavens, made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations, and all the ends of the earth saw his salvation.*

God works by *casualties*: by means which are called *accidental*. Such was the passing by of the Midianitish merchantmen, as the means of rescuing the favourite son of Israel from the cruelty of his brethren. Such was the coming of Pharaoh's daughter to the river, where the infant Moses was laid in the flags, by which he was discovered, saved from perishing, and trained up for the work of God, in the house of his most inveterate enemy. When Saul and his men had encompassed the man after God's own heart, and were ready to satisfy their long prevailing thirst for his blood, in that very moment there came a messenger to Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore he returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines.† Ahab, King of Israel, a man who had awfully distinguished himself by every kind of abomination, was slain by a casual stroke, in fulfilment of Micaiah's prophecy, though he had

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engaged

* Isaiah lii, 10. † 1 Sam. xxiii. 27, 28.

engaged on his side every precaution likely to overturn that prophecy. A certain man drew a bow at a *venture*, and smote him, so that he died.* All the forgetfulness and mistakes of men, are subservient to the designs of God. Sometimes he makes use of them without their knowledge, as he did Cyrus; and at other times against their wills, as he did Balaam and Jonah.—Thus you see that the resources of providence never fail. There will always be a seed to serve him in the world. He will not leave himself without witnesses. Some Joshua will be found to stand in the place of a departed Moses; some Elisha to catch the falling mantle of an Elijah; and some Matthias to plead the cause of Christ instead of an apostate Judas: the hearts of men are in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water he turneth them whithersoever he will.†

FOURTHLY. The dispensations of Divine Providence, are often in their nature, operations, and final issue, *incomprehensible*.

Consider the present state of the world in
reference

* 1 Kings xxii. 34. † Prov. xxi. 1.

reference to the important concerns of religion, and you will be lost in the vast abyss of God's permissive wisdom, and forbearing mercy. By far the greater part of the human race are estranged from the fountain of happiness; and so fascinated by the things that are seen, as totally to forget those that are unseen, spiritual, and eternal. Polluted and enslaved by innumerable vices, they seem to live for no other purpose than that of displaying their wonderful depravity in despising and rejecting the only foundation on which they can build with safety for eternal life. And alas! with these miserable men (such is their stupidity) the terror of Mount Sinai, and the love of Mount Calvary, are alike destitute of effect; still they persevere, regardless of the destruction which every moment hangs over their heads, and which they cannot escape, dying as they live. Thus guilty and ruined has been the state of the world, under the dominion of sin, for almost six thousand years. But why does Almighty God permit the evils he could so easily prevent? Why does he suffer his Majesty to be insulted? His Son crucified? His Spirit resisted and grieved? The powers of darkness

to triumph in the willing captivity of so many millions of his creatures?—I ask why does he suffer these provocations, and still keep silence? My brethren, can any of you solve this question? I freely confess to you I cannot; nor do I think the attempt possible, without incurring the charge of daring presumption. Where scripture is silent or dark, we should be cautious; humbly adore, and patiently wait that day when all the dark mazes in which Providence now walks, will be perfectly cleared up.

The inscrutable nature of Providence is to be considered in application to the supernatural agency of the holy Spirit, in enlightening the understanding, and engaging the affections of men—men long and zealously devoted to the service of the prince of darkness and disobedience—men in every sense mean and miserable. But few of those who are interested in the riches, nobility, wisdom, and grandeur of time, are found the subjects of this essential work. The ransomed of the Lord Jesus are, in general, such as he himself was, poor and despised, men of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He takes those
who

who are treated as the refuse of the world, adorns them with the beauties of his moral image, and waits to bestow upon them all the inconceivable immunities of the celestial city. When we trace the footsteps of Providence in the conversion of sinners, through the sacred pages, we are overshadowed with a cloud of witnesses, and lost in the amazing contemplation of redeeming mercy bestowed on the most unworthy objects, and by the most improbable means. A polluted Magdalene, Zaccheus the publican, the woman of Samaria, Saul of Tarsus, the Philippian jailor, the thief on the cross, and a great multitude, which no man can number, are now in all the perfection of disembodied spirits, adoring him who doth great things past finding out, uniting in the wonder and joy of angels on the return of every perishing prodigal to the Father of Mercies.

The conduct of Providence will appear very mysterious if we consider that the worst of men are often prosperous and happy, while the peculiar favourites of the Almighty are oppressed and wretched. While those whose conduct is founded upon the best of prin-

principles, and directed to the noblest ends, sink under the heavy hand of adversity; the tabernacles of robbers prosper, they that provoke God are secure, and enjoy more abundantly the blessings of life. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men: They have no bonds in their death, but their strength is firm. This prosperity of the wicked, in contrast with the afflictions of the righteous, excited the envy of the Psalmist; * the wonder of Jeremiah,† and the rebellious murmurings of Israel.‡ It is in our day as it was in theirs. Providence does not pursue any new path. In all ages it has taken the same course; and, if we are in our right minds, we shall bow in submission—In submission, not founded on the hard laws of necessity, or composed of stoical apathy; but a steady, joyful persuasion that the darkest days of the man who loves and serves God, are infinitely more advantageous than the brightest days of those who walk according to the course of this world. The pearl of great price is not found in the riches and glories of the

* Psalm lxxiii. 3. † Jer. xii. 1. ‡ Mal. iii. 14, 15.

the earth, but in the poverty and sufferings of the cross. The way to the paradise of God, was not by the sumptuous, luxurious table of Dives, but the hunger, disease, and deep wretchedness of Lazarus. To the unregenerate, prosperity is the aggravation of guilt, the prelude of eternal sorrows and despair; while the adversity of those who are called according to the purpose of Jehovah, is the test and trial of virtue, their meetness for, and title to, that state where there is neither death, pain, sorrow nor crying. And this blessedness, which the saints have in reversion, so far exceeds *all* the votaries of the world have in possession, that instead of envying them, we should exercise every generous emotion of pity and compassion towards them. What, shall we envy their snares? Shall we envy them those enjoyments which only prepare them, like beasts, for the day of slaughter? To envy their prosperity is to envy their destruction, for the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.* Then let them dwell on high, as those who shall never see sorrow; and be it our ambition to bear with calm, silent dignity all the contemptuous

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* Prov. i. 32.

temptuous, cruel triumphs which their present exaltation may inspire; assured that those triumphs will prove short in their duration, and that when the Son of Man appears in the glory of the last day, their unaccountable superiority will vanish for ever.

There are *innumerable* questions arising from the conduct of providence, in reference to which we must for a time remain in the dark. Our God is in the heavens, where we cannot climb. The records of his everlasting decrees are sealed, so that we cannot peruse them. All that we are capable of knowing on this side the grave, lies in a very small compass. We are surrounded with the mists and darkness of ignorance, prejudice, and impurity. We are but of yesterday, and know *nothing*,* therefore let us commune with our own hearts, and be *still*; let us not indulge an inordinate curiosity in our speculations on the secret things of heaven; let us "Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore."

FIFTHLY.

* Job. viii, 9.

FIFTHLY. The providence of God often wears a severe, and terrible aspect.

Let me suppose that any of you, who are parents and love your children, were called to make a sacrifice similar to that of the Father of the Faithful. Do you think you could coolly prepare the wood, the fire, and the knife? Unreluctantly lead forth the child of your hopes, and stretch out your hand to slay him? I grant had you the same degree of faith, there would be no difficulty in this obedience: But whilst we observe you so deaf to the voice of providence, or attentive only to murmur, when called to resign those things which deserve no other name than absolute trifles in the constitution of your happiness; we cannot believe that you would give up that which is and ought to be dear to you as the Isaac of Abraham, and not betray the boldest disposition to arraign the justice, and goodness of God—and not impiously exclaim—Why should I wait any longer on such an hard, severe master! It is an awful truth, that vast numbers, who make a profession of the gospel, evidence a constant
propension

propension (when put to the test) to risk every thing important, for the possession of some object, worthless perhaps in itself, if not destructive in its influence.

It is no uncommon thing to find even the brightest ornaments of the church, under some sorrow or other, writing bitter things against themselves, because some source of creature comfort is dried up. In the life of Jacob, this observation is strikingly verified; driven from his father's house to Padan-aram, by the vengeance of his brother, he feels all the pains of subtilty and envy, in opposition to the expected kindness of one allied to him by the ties of blood. After fourteen years servitude he leaves this ungracious relation, and is pursued by him as a thief. Isaac, his venerable father, dies; and his death is almost immediately succeeded by the death of his beloved Rachael. Scarce has he buried his father and wife, but Joseph—his favourite son Joseph, is torn from him, and he knows not how or by whom. Upon the consideration of these things, his patience and courage fail; he sinks into a state of despondency, and rashly asserts that all these providences were against him.

But

But God had a set time to be favourable to him—a set time to exchange his spirit of heaviness for the garments of praise; and this time was just at hand when he thought his mercy clean gone for ever. Thus the moment before the Israelites experienced that deliverance which was commanded for them, their salvation appeared impossible, and their ruin inevitable. As it is often most dark before the break of day, so providence appears most severe, when about to communicate some singular blessing.

It is probable that *this day with you*, is a day of deep distress. You are bowed down under a strange combination of afflictions, which you too boldly discriminate as the severity of God. Weakness and pain of body; disappointments and losses in your commerce with the world; bereavements in your families; harrassed by the fiery darts of the wicked one; defamed and persecuted by his emissaries; and, to aggravate these, you are tormented by a thousand anxieties and fears lest you should prove insincere, in your profession of religion, and be found wanting when weighed in the balances. But *Peace, be still*—there will arise light out of all

all this darkness; the greatest kindness will be discovered in all this reputed severity. The frowns of providence conceal those smiles which will prove the perfection of your felicity when the springs of life fail. Do not mistake the gentle rod of a faithful father, for the avenging sword of an implacable enemy; do not suffer any of your crosses to obliterate the remembrance of past mercies, or delude you from the anticipation of that state of bliss, where all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes.

SIXTHLY. The infinitely various operations of providence *harmonize* in the honour of Deity, and the happiness of all good men.

This harmony originates in the eternal fore-knowledge and unalterable decrees of that God, whose wisdom delights in variety, whose power orders that variety in such a sovereign manner, that no one dispensation falls out of its rank, and whose goodness is so conjoined with every other perfection of his nature, as to secure the everlasting gratitude of his people, who *now* bemoan the inexplicable confusion in which they are involved. We live in

a state of perpetual vicissitudes; and whenever we attempt to judge of the harmony of Jehovah's plans, by the painful effects which those vicissitudes produce on our natural feelings, we shall be enslaved by the power of infidelity, and presumptuously conclude that the ways of the Lord are not equal. What though the arrows of providence seem to fly at random, and its favours to be scattered among men promiscuously, they, nevertheless, have their *particular* commissions. Though the affairs of life may appear as thrown together in wild confusion; yet, like so many well-tuned instruments, under the infinitely wise hand of God, they compose a delightful concert in his praise as a God of perfect order.

Inspiration assures us that all things, in their *compound* state, operate together for the good of the saints. But if they separate one providence from another, or any part from the whole, darkness and confusion will cover the face of the great deep: an horror of great darkness will take possession of their minds, and banish every comfortable sense of this truth, that the dealings of God with his people, *not separately but connectively*, work together
for

their good. This is the fundamental basis of that patience and submission which the scriptures universally inculcate, and which have animated good men under the greatest difficulties, heaviest losses, and sharpest conflicts: this is *their* constant language,—I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgement for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.* Such a temper of soul honours the promise of God, reflects a blessed lustre on all his ways, encourages his timorous friends, and confounds his most inveterate enemies. What magnanimity! What patience! What joy did the primitive Christians manifest under the greatest cruelties which the subtilty of their enemies could invent, or their power inflict! Be it our ambition and glory to tread in their steps, as far as we can, under the milder rays of civil and religious liberty, and to endure, as seeing our God in the heavens, who doeth whatsoever seemeth good in his sight.

I scarce think the state of an Epicurean, who denies the being of providence (and such still
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* Micah vii. 9.

exist in principle and practice) so unhappy as the state of that man who, under the obligations of a christian profession, pretends to admit the doctrine, and yet is forever quarrelling with its operations, as in some instances unjust, and in all as destitute of harmony. But what is the cause of such a disposition? They have been disappointed in the gratification of some criminal passion, deprived of some object on which their affections were idolatrously fixed, some fine-spun thread of human policy is broken, their deep-laid schemes of happiness blasted; they are afflicted with infirmities and pains, by which they have lost (not their attachment to the world, but) the power of pursuing it. These and all other dispensations which run counter to their unsanctified affections, they treat as positive evils from the Lord; and on this ground maintain an eternal war in their minds against his government. But tell me, you who rank with men of this description—tell me, what are the advantages you expect to result from your rebellion? Can you effect any change in the order of his designs? Which of his high decrees can you reverse? What satisfaction or joy alleviates your distresses? Why will you make the

chains of providence (intended perhaps for your good) more galling by your impotent struggles? An impatient discontented man is both incapable and unworthy of happiness. Go where he may, he carries that in his breast which will mightily torment him. Happiness, only the friend of those who possess a meek and quiet spirit, will fly from him; and misery, resembling that of outer darkness, unweariedly pursue him. He is a wretched fugitive on the earth, and like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, loudly foams out his own shame.

The day of retribution draweth nigh—The Lord Jesus will come *quickly* to explain and glorify the whole œconomy of his providence; to the confusion and terror of those who would not that he should reign over them; and to the satisfaction and joy of those who have submitted to his will as their law, and studied his glory as their end. Then you, who now go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you. You shall reap such an abundant harvest as will infinitely more than reward your toils. Then all those providences
which

which have corroded the dearest comforts of your lives, and filled you with the most distressing apprehensions, will be found the *most* abundant sources of pleasure and gratitude. Therefore, while your gourds are successively withering under the scorching heat of an unfriendly world, guard against that sorrow which has no connection with the hope of the gospel; and through every changing scene of mortality, exercise all the resigned ardour of your sanctified nature, in looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God our Saviour Jesus Christ.

But to you who have only lived to abuse the blessings, and rebel against the dispensations of providence; that day—*That day*, so glorious to the meek and lowly followers of the Redeemer, will prove a day of darkness and gloominess; a day of clouds and thick darkness; as the morning spread upon the mountains; a day of distress and anguish.* I think I see you, with your once gay, thoughtless, and dissipated companions, forced into the presence of an impartial, inexorable Judge, under the most terrible apprehensions

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* Joel ii. 2.

that guilt and hell can create. Your mirth is turned into mourning and weeping. Instead of that attachment which prevailed between you in the commission of sin, there is now nothing but hatred, upbraiding, and curses. The remembrance of past pleasure only tends to aggravate your pains; for, however forgetful you *were* of the power that formed and protected you, of the bounty that supplied you, or of the overtures of mercy made to you, *now* you cannot forget. Your noblest faculty is become your chief tormentor—But I rejoice that you are yet within the reach of pardoning grace, that the day of your visitation is not yet closed; and will you,—will you, after all, persevere in the desperate folly of bartering the unsearchable riches of religion for a little glittering dust, the substantial pleasures of a heart devoted to God, for a few bubbles of air; the infinite glories of eternity, for the gratifications of a moment, when *another* hour may sink you down to shame, torture, and utter darkness—Behold how clearly Jesus Christ reveals himself in the gospel, as able and willing to save to the uttermost! How earnestly he calls you, invites you, pleads with

with you, to ask those blessings which, in his redeemed, are a well of water springing up to everlasting life! *—Then harden not your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, but fly in this *acceptable* time from the delusions of sensuality, lay hold on the hope set before you, study the truth, submit to the afflictions, and be grateful for the blessings of providence; and our God in the heavens will rain down the consolations of his everlasting favour, to cheer and animate your minds under all the sorrows of life; and when you have finished as an hireling your day, he will reward you with the perfect fruition of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

• John iv. 14.

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